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Randall W. Maxey, M.D., Ph.D.
President

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

March 25, 2004

The Honorable Michael K. Powell
The Portals
445 12th Street, SW
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Powell:

Re: Ex Parte Submission

CS Docket No. 98-120

The National Medical Association ("NMA") represents the interests of 25,000 African American physicians and the patients they serve. The NMA also serves as a leading voice in efforts to eliminate health disparities and to increase health literacy. The organization has nearly 100 affiliated chapters throughout the United States and its territories.

Communications has become an important factor in how successful we are in reaching underserved populations. Through the innovations of NMA members, our organization is exploring ways in which we can more effectively reach those underserved populations most in need of health education. We are keenly aware of the heavy viewing habits of African American consumers. Unfortunately, there is very little health outreach programming directed to these communities in the communications medium most effective in these communities.

I recently participated in a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Forum on cable television issues and was shocked to discover the significant barriers faced by those organizations interested in distributing quality empowering content. I heard of stories of denial of access to distribution systems. I also recognized the great potential in addressing health issues through quality programming. This experience encouraged me to evaluate how these barriers have likely impacted the ability of organizations such as the NMA to disseminate information in its community's best interest. I have concluded that there are significant barriers to accessing the distribution systems necessary to

disseminate vital healthcare information and that these barriers drastically reduce our abilities to positively impact the lives of millions of people.

Fortunately, next generation digital technologies will give us the capability to disseminate content long neglected by current video distribution models. It is imperative that the FCC consider the appropriate implementation schemes that will need to be put in place to ensure that every American have ample access to content that will work to eliminate health disparities, increase health literacy, and inspire a diverse new generation of healthcare professionals potential and necessary. **I would like to express my strong support for Digital Multicast Must Carry.**

Digital multicasting represents a great opportunity to reintroduce robust competition and diversity of material to the video content marketplace. By increasing the channel capacity of local and independent broadcasters, the FCC will greatly increase the chances of the NMA securing effective distribution of the types of programming we believe will be effective in addressing health issues. If the FCC does not support digital multicasting, we will miss another generation of opportunity to exploit media technologies for the public good. It is no exaggeration that these issues are a matter of life or death. I urge the FCC to address the digital multicasting issue with a sense of urgency and heightened attention reflective of this sentiment.

I urge the FCC to move quickly in ordering operators to carry the entirety of every local broadcaster's DTV signal. We can ill afford to continue underutilizing communications mediums to inform our communities about vital healthcare information.

Sincerely,

Randall W. Maxey, M.D., Ph.D.

Randall W. Maxey, M.D., Ph.D.
President
National Medical Association

Cc: The Honorable Kathleen Q. Abernathy
The Honorable Michael J. Copps
The Honorable Kevin J. Martin
The Honorable Jonathan S. Adelstein